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CHAPTER EIGHT

A Place for Philosophy in the ADAPT Program

by E.T. Carpenter

Although there are many ways in which the ADAPT program is importantly different from other educational programs in the United States at this mid-seventies time, surely it stands as impressive in higher education by being the only college program spanning six disciplines which seeks primarily to employ the genetic epistemology of Jean Piaget in diagnostic and teaching strategies. It stands as a testing ground for a revolutionary hypothesis about college-level education: the degree of effectiveness of a teaching strategy depends directly upon the logical ability of the individual learner and his place on the developmental continuum relative to the logical demands presupposed by the assignment.

Back in 1935, Piaget remarked that "there are <u>two</u> terms in the relation constituted by education: on the one hand the growing individual; on the other the social, intellectual, and moral values into which the educator is charged with initiating that individual." He suggested that adults, being the "teachers" for the most part, seeing things from their own viewpoint and being ignorant not only of the state of the "learner" but also of the sorts of changes that the learner must undergo to gain understanding of the adult's knowledge, have engaged in perfecting methods of teaching which make the role of the student primarily one of passive receptor while that of the teacher is active in "transmitting," in "passing on," usually verbally, the values of his society.

This state of affairs has been, in small measure, broken down in some sectors especially with respect to elementary schools. But the forty years since Piaget made these remarks have not seen much of a change on the college and university level. When college teachers think of themselves as "teachers," even in the 1970s, the prevailing image they have is one of themselves lecturing while the students are listening. The passive-receptor role of the learner is still widely assumed by American college teachers. All the while large proportions of entering college freshmen do not finish their year in college and

more do not return for a sophomore year. Also we notice too often that those who do stay in may complete one semester's course with adequate grades and then go on to the next level of course work improperly prepared by the courses that were prerequisite. Obviously, something is seriously wrong in the higher level teaching-learning situations--something that attention to Piaget's 1935 definition of "to educate" might have served to allay. Our "educators" have apparently behaved egocentrically. They have tended to ignore their student's worldviews. And in their ignorance, they have failed to help the student effectively bridge the gap between his own worldview and that being "taught". Through the assumption of active-teacher vs. passive-student roles, the student has been discouraged from active generation of principles or from invention of methods and procedures, and denied access to concrete experience. So finding the way himself is a monumental task.

With the inception of the ADAPT program there is the occasion for testing-out of certain parts of the Piagetian theory of development as related to the teaching of young adults -- 17 years old and older -- within the college setting and involving integration of several disciplines. It allows us to see if attention to the logical development of the student in planning the activities by which he is to learn <u>does</u> make a difference in the quality of his understanding. It provides the occasion to find out whether within specific disciplines there are characteristic developmental steps in knowing -- such that ordinal scales within some new contexts may be suggested. Further it supplies an opportunity for competent people in different disciplines to come to understand better each others' fields and intellectual concerns, to respect and to cooperate with them in fostering their students' learning.

Since diagnosing the ability of the student by means of looking at the forms of reasoning he exhibits in the course of problem solving involves one in the sort of elementary formal logical analysis which philosophers have long counted among their professional skills, it would seem natural that the ADAPT program have room for philosophy at least in so far as it is hoped that the students in the program be made aware of their own reasoning patterns preparatory to consciously controlling their use. It would have been exciting for the program to have included philosophy as one of its six disciplines, but since that had not been so, it was suggested that some of those ends which a philosophy course would have served might be met by a seventh "course" in the program.

So, for one hour weekly, ADAPT students attended a seminar in which they were asked to reflect upon the things they were doing in their six courses and upon their relationships to those

things. The aim of the seminar was not to provide them with specific ideas, tools, or skills; rather it was intended to give them at least one period each week where they would have intellectual space and time to "get it all together"--their ideas, their ways of working, their feelings, etc. In the seminar they were encouraged to formulate their views of their "world" in college and to focus on similarities and differences in their reasonings and valuings as they compared their activities, etc., from the six disciplines of their program. The seminar also provided a place for the faculty to see where students were in relation to other parts of their program rather than just with respect to their own courses. And with both faculty and students present, there were opportunities for exchange of views and communication of experiences.

In attempting to view these activities in terms of a learning-cycle, it seems that much of what might be considered as an exploration happened before the seminar meetings and in the specific course activities that students engaged in. The seminar was the occasion, however, for their verbalizing about those activities so as to invent ways of putting them together, seeing them as similar and yet different from one another. It was also a place to hypothesize out loud about professors' strategies and to compare valuation schemes that they found being used.

If discovery happened in the seminar meeting, it usually was merely verbalized for sharing with others there and then awaited testing-out in out-of-seminar activities. Yet the reactions of his peers to the student's shared discoveries provided a helpful incentive for getting clear about his own thinking.

Seminar sessions during 1975-76 touched on many concerns including such questions as: What are your problem-solving processes like--comparing problems from different courses? How are grades regarded by you? What are their significance? What did you expect college would be like and is it what you expected? How do you organize work in small groups--compared to work individually? What are your expectations in classes, courses, etc., for your next year in college?

Though questions often focused on cognitive matters, the students' ways of handling them in seminar revealed something of their emotional reactions to various elements of the whole situation. Thus faculty were informed as to the extent to which emotional investment in the situation was making it difficult for them to reach equilibrium on intellectual matters. It became apparent that the students' responses to cognitive problems were related to their own ways of seeing themselves as persons. If they felt confident about themselves and comfortable with their own identities, then they could separate their successes and

failures in classroom problem solving from their worthiness and integrity as persons and they were more ready to take risks in the concrete learning-cycle activities of their classes. Thus the sorts of interrelationships of the affective, the social, and the cognitive aspects of the students' growth that Piaget acknowledged in Six Psychological Studies (1967) was often expressed in students' seminar behaviors. For example, hostility toward professors was accompanied by "I can't do it!"-body language when students found themselves in an "I don't know where to put it!"-quandary with respect to a required class activity. Then, as they rethought to "Maybe I can do it!" and began taking intellectual risks in trying ways to sort things out and, in that way, received feedback on their trials, they found they made progress and were less hostile toward the professors.

Whether or not the activities of the seminar are fittingly called "philosophy" is an open question among today's philosophers, for there is by no means unanimity in approach within the field as to what constitutes philosophy. It is clear, however, that some goals for the seminar coincide with the traditional views of philosophy, since aims for the students were to approach some synthesis of the ideas they were to pick up from their courses in the six specific disciplines.

Our way of structuring the seminar activities was, however, loose enough so that no specific philosophical position or positions was to be the outcome--students were encouraged to find a way for themselves and to imagine the behaviors and the valuing patterns that they would be committed to if they adopted certain stances. This is introductory philosophy as Piaget would view it, judging from his remarks in The Place of the Sciences of Man in the System of the Sciences (1974):

> Since philosophy attempts to encompass the whole of reality, it necessarily bears two characteristics that constitute its true originality. The first consists in not dissociating questions one from another, since its specific purpose is to aim at the whole. The second is that, in the attempt to coordinate all human activities, each philosophical position implies evaluation and commitment, which excludes the possibility of any general meeting of minds to the extent that the values involved are unshakable (for example, spirituality or materialism, and so on).

If one adopts the view of philosophy suggested here by Piaget, there is clear justification for the establishment of the philosophy course as one of the credit-bearing courses which

constitute the Piagetian program. And if it were made open to participation by the faculty as well as the students, such a class might easily be used as a place for monitoring the logical behavior of the students just as the ADAPT seminar was used. Further, in such a course the student could be challenged to analyze formally his own logic and to formulate his own world-views to achieve an economy in his own processing of the compartmentalized "reality" presented him through the subject matters distinquished under the different "course" headings. In addition the student might be encouraged to become aware of the valuation patterns within his decision making existence and in the implications of various strategies.

With such a course, not only could there be a testing of the program and the Piagetian principles on which it centers, but also an important test of a philosophy oriented use of the genetic epistemology could be accomplished. At the least it would provide some documentation for the claim of Henry L. Ruf (1976) that "philosophers have the capacity to teach people to think clearly and thoroughly" within a multidisciplinary, developmentally oriented college program.

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